

# High School Open House

## Area high schools live out Catholic identity

By Eileen Connelly, OSU

From the simple yet meaningful practice of beginning and ending each day with prayer over the public address system to deeply held core values rooted in their mission, Catholic identity is lived out on a daily basis at high schools in the archdiocese.

“Our Catholic schools have a unique contribution to make to the church and to the world,” noted Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr. “This they do best by being authentically Catholic. As I visit Catholic high schools around the archdiocese, I am pleased to see so many signs that Christ is the reason for the school. This is demonstrated by the presence of crucifixes and chapels and it is lived out in Masses, retreats, and loving service to the community.”

“In our Catholic schools, the teachings of Jesus must be taught faithfully and completely, not only in words and classroom lessons, but also by the very manner in which we conduct our daily lives,” he added. “The very atmosphere of a Catholic school must radiate the conviction of St. Peter, who professed, ‘Lord, only you have the words of everlasting life.’ This happens only when, in every class and every classroom — not just the religion classroom — we seek opportunities to highlight the depth of truth to be found in the teachings of Jesus.”

At Mother of Mercy High School on Cincinnati west side, the students experience the legacy of Catherine McAuley, who founded the Sisters of Mercy, and literally learn to walk her footsteps, said Kirsten MacDougal, president. “The Sisters of Mercy were originally known as the ‘Walking Sisters’ because Catherine inspired a following of women who sought to serve the impoverished where they were, outside their convents,” MacDougal explained. “Our Catholic faith calls us to be disciples of Jesus and to continue ‘walking,’ demonstrating a spirit of compassion and service to all those around us. Whether struggling from a lack of resources or hurting from the cruel actions and words of others, the young women of Mercy learn to ‘walk the talk’ of our faith and heal the pain of their sisters and brothers. In this lies our Catholic identity. We put our mission in action and use the good work of Mercy to touch the lives of others.”

The students themselves assume a leadership role in promoting Catholic identity at Mercy, said Johanna Becker, director of campus ministry. The school’s Campus Ministry Team, comprised of homeroom representatives and a board of seven students, helps lead the school in spiritual matters and faith development. Activities include, but are not limited to, liturgies, prayer services, retreats and eucharistic adoration. Java with Jesus, when students



COURTESY PHOTO

Marianist Brother Wilbert, a volunteer at Archbishop Moeller High School, studies an exhibit at the school that reflects its charism/mission.

gather in the Campus Ministry Office for prayer and coffee, provides a chance for sharing their faith in a relaxed atmosphere. Various clubs, such as Mercy Works, and community service opportunities enable to students to put their faith into action reaching out to those in need in the local community and beyond.

“Service is an integral part of our curriculum,” Becker said. “For example, in their sophomore year, we engage the students in an urban plunge and an awareness

retreat that helps them explore their own prejudices and the injustices that exist in our own city.”

The young men at Archbishop Moeller High School also have plenty of opportunity become leaders in their faith as they experience Catholic education in the Marianist tradition. The Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, founder of the Marianist order, had a vision for education

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## IDENTITY

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that encompassed five principal characteristics of educating the whole person. They include: educating for faith formation; providing an integral, quality education; educating in the family spirit; educating for service, peace and justice; and educating for adaption and change.

"We believe the Marianist characteristics provide the foundation for developing leadership in young men," said Blane Collison principal. "The mission of a Moeller education is to assist parents in helping their son make responsible choices and leading them to use their talents and gifts in service to others and for the benefit of all society. Ultimately, we are not just developing the best leaders in the world. We are developing the best leaders for the world."

Jim Elfers, director of pastoral ministry at the school, said that the five characteristics and the holistic educational approach of the Marianist charism are integral to the students' faith formation. "Because we have this philosophy, academics aren't separate from faith formation. Opportunities for students to grow in their faith and serve others get a lot of emphasis and support from the administration."

Whether it's praying the rosary Friday morning before school starts, taking part in the Corryville Little Buddies Tutoring Program, which pairs a Moeller junior or senior with a Corryville Catholic student in

pre-school through the third grade, or making a retreat, Elfers said it is a privilege to see the students grow in their faith while strengthening their relationships God and others.

"The self-realization and the communal realization that they come to takes my breath away sometimes," he said. "The students see each other as brothers even though they're different from one another. They realize God is working in their lives even though they may not be aware of it. That's what makes being in a Catholic school really great."

Catholic identity is literally at the heart of Bishop Fenwick High School in Franklin, with the chapel located in center of the school's campus. When Betty Turvy, director of admissions, gives tours of Fenwick to prospective students and their parents, "I tell them that the chapel is a reminder that our entire being and our life here is centered on our faith."

The chapel is a source of life and faith for students, Turvy noted. There is a weekly school-wide liturgy and Mass is celebrated before football and basketball games. Daily Mass is celebrated not only for students and teachers, but is also opened to members of the local community. In addition, Turvy said, beautiful pieces of religious artwork adorn the walls and halls of the school. "There's no doubt we're a Catholic school," she said.

Turvy is also the parent of two Fenwick graduates, Mary, who graduated in 2010, and Jimmy, a member of the class of 2011. Both young people now attend Miami University are active in St. Mary Campus



COURTESY PHOTO

With Father Kyle Schnippel presiding. Mother of Mercy students celebrate Mass with their grandparents.

Ministry in Oxford, which serves the school. "I have no doubt that the strong foundation in their faith at Fenwick, the fact that they were surrounded by and it became part of their being, has strengthened them as Catholics as they've gone off to college," Turvy said.

She believes the presence of one woman religious, Sister of Charity Donna Bryant, and two priests, Fathers Jason Bedel and Ed Pratt, also helps Fenwick maintain its Catholic identity. "They're all a wonderful influence on the students, the way they share their faith and live it out," she said.

Father Bedel, who celebrates weekly Mass for the students, is available for the sacrament of reconciliation every Wednesday and teaches two religion classes noted that Fenwick's Catholic

identity is even represented by the school's mascot — the falcon. The four falcon talons represent the strength, tenacity and commitment to action of the Bishop Fenwick family. The faith talon represents strong belief in prayer and in the Gospels, responsibility, self-control, Christian leadership, courage and care for others. The compassion talon symbolizes the respect, courtesy, tolerance, acceptance, empathy, non-violence and forgiveness that Jesus demonstrated in the Gospel stories. The integrity talon embodies truth, loyalty, incorruptibility, tenacity, honor, openness, inner strength and wholeness, and the service talon exemplifies unselfishness, generosity, sacrifice, tirelessness, humility and persistence in working for social justice. ■

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